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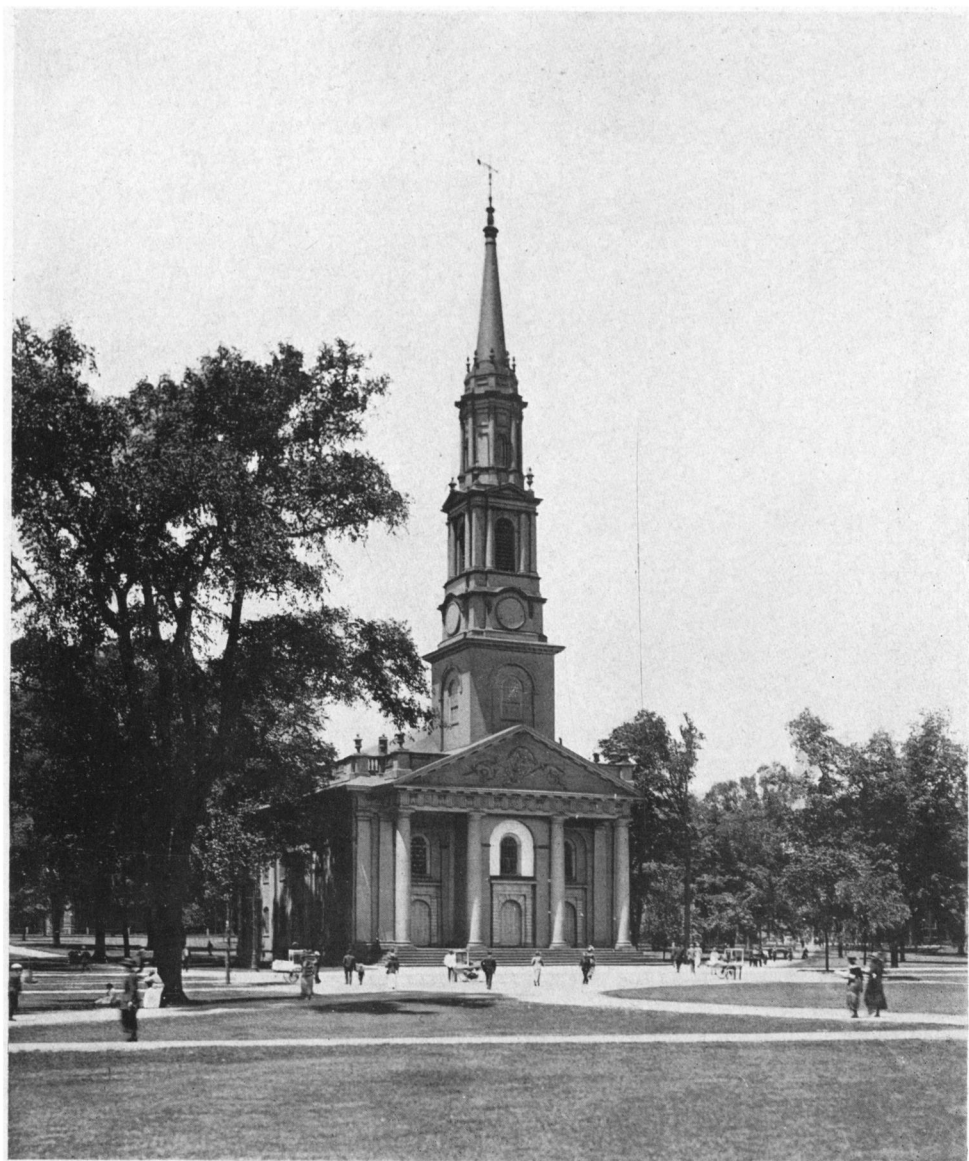
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CENTER CHURCH

ITHIEL TOWN

## ITHIEL TOWN—ARCHITECT

BY GEORGE DUDLEY SEYMOUR

AT the same time that David Hoadley, the self-taught architect, so-called, of Waterbury, was building North Church on New Haven Green, Ithiel Town was building Center and Trinity

Churches in close proximity. These three churches, two of exceptional merit as designs, standing in a row on the "Green," gave New Haven its distinctive New England character and unique

and incomparable charm, heightened, of course, by the elms, the glory of the city, which are no more.

New Haven Green, with Center and North Churches, is unrivaled by any New England city in preserving a picture of old New England of which it is a sort of concentration. The passing of the elms within the last three years and other changes have shorn the spot of much of its beauty, but the churches grow in interest as the great tradition of which they were a part fades. Of course, many New England villages with their white meeting houses still retain the air and flavor of the old time, but no city that I can recall has any open space with two buildings of quite the same quality as Center and North Churches on New Haven Green.

Whether Town's Center Church is a finer design than Hoadley's North Church will be debated as long as the structures stand, but the value and beauty of the former has been much impaired since 1845, when the interior was extensively remodeled and the exterior, red brick laid in Flemish bond with white wood trimmings, was covered with drab paint. The removal of this paint and the restoration of the exterior of the church to its original simple and dignified appearance which is at the present time in progress gives timely interest to the architect who was also the builder, and who, though a great man in his time, seems to have been almost forgotten by posterity.

Ithiel Town was born in 1784 in Thompson, Connecticut, where his family had been settled for several generations, originally coming from Topsfield, Massachusetts.

The Towns were farmer folk of the plainer sort. Archelaus Town, Ithiel's father, belied his name, and died young, leaving a large family and a small estate. Ithiel was then but eight years old. Of schooling he can have had but little. He was soon working as a house-carpenter; then he went to Boston and presently attracted attention by planning some improvements in Bulfinch's State House. That effort, as tradition

asserts, gave him a start, but what he then did we are not told. He must have made rapid progress at all events, since in 1810, when he was only twenty-six years old, he came to New Haven prepared to do designing and building work. What led him to come to New Haven the writer has not learned. Two years later (1812) he was chosen to design and build Center Church, and that work was hardly begun before he was chosen to design and build Trinity Church. Both of these structures were finished in 1815 when Town was thirty-one years old. They placed him at the very front rank of the profession in this country. It is not unworthy of notice that, when he first came to New Haven, he built his own designs, and this practice he seems to have continued for many years as far as work in New Haven was concerned. He is generally spoken of as the first trained architect to settle in New Haven, but it must not be forgotten that he followed the custom of the time and built his own designs and is listed among early New Haven builders.

He was also noted as a bridge engineer. The "Town Truss," which he patented, was extensively used in New England and also in the South. In addition to Center and Trinity Churches, he designed the old State House, the Professor Salisbury House (about 1839), and other buildings for New Haven as well as some other private residences. His design for the Eagle Bank is said to be still in existence. It was to have been built on the site of the present Exchange Building, but the failure of the bank frustrated the plan. The design called for a building in the classical style, not unlike, it is said, the old State House. It is also claimed that Town designed and built the house with a classical portico on Temple Street, now owned by the United Church Society and used as a chapel.

For Hartford he designed the Wadsworth Atheneum, Christ Church and the old City Hall, which formerly stood on Kingsley and Market streets where the police building now stands.

For New York he designed the Astor

House on Broadway and the Merchants Exchange on Wall Street. From 1829 to 1843 he was in partnership with Alexander J. Davis with offices in the Merchants Exchange. Together with Davis he designed the State Capitol buildings for South Carolina and Indiana, and many other public buildings.

His library of architectural and art books was famous—probably the richest and most complete that had been brought together in America up to the time of his death, and perhaps not equalled since, unless by the collection of architectural books brought together in recent years by Columbia College. It was dispersed at his death, one section being sold in New Haven, another in Boston and another in Philadelphia. A partial list of the books is included in the inventory of his effects. (See New Haven Probate Records, Vol. 57.) For references to his library see Dunlap's "History of the Arts of Design," New York, 1834, pages 299 and 300, and 410-411. Atwater's "History of the Colony of New Haven," pages 536 and 548, has a brief but inadequate account of Town.

Town spent his last days in a house which he built about 1832 on Hillhouse Avenue. It was sold to and remodeled by Joseph Earl Sheffield, who bequeathed it to the Sheffield Scientific School. Town died in New Haven January 13, 1844, and is buried in the Grove Street Cemetery, where a plain marble slab marks his grave; but Center Church remains as his monument. He left a fair estate; in his will he provided for an annuity

for his aged mother, who married a Tourtellot after the death of Archelaus Town, his father. He seems to have inherited his gifts from her. His bust in the Yale Art School by Chauncey B. Ives, a native of Hamden, was greatly admired when made.

Town wrote several books, and among them "Improvement in the Construction of Wood and Iron Bridges," New Haven, 1821; a pamphlet with plates and a frontispiece engraved by S. S. Jocelyn and showing "Town's Bridge." Presumably this was the old covered bridge over Lake Whitney. He edited "A Detail of Some Particular Service Performed in America During the Years 1776-1779."

Town had, as the inventory on file in the Probate Office shows, not only a remarkable collection of fine books, but also a house full of paintings, engravings, busts, casts, cabinets of curios and whatever else an artist collects. The place was a veritable museum and was so called by the townspeople. It was one of the show places of New Haven and the privileged citizens took their visitors there to see these wonders. In those early days the collector of "old things" was not abroad in the land and the spoils of Europe had not reached our shores except as great rarities. For many years a pair of curious stone lions—perhaps they were dogs—bought at "Mr. Town's auction," stood in front of Dr. Levi Ives' house on Temple Street; but they were taken indoors long since lest they should find their way to the Campus.

## JAPANESE LACQUER

BY JULIA HALL BARTHOLOMEW

**A**MONG the productions for which Japan is celebrated, lacquer holds first place. Like many other Japanese arts its source is traced through Korea to China. Specimens of remarkable antiquity have been preserved, and mention

is made of the existence of the art as early as 400 B. C. In the middle of the sixth century A. D. Buddhist priests came from Korea to Japan bringing art in their train. The temples were the great studios where design and decoration had